

## [Bartholomew Albecker]

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German—employed by Seth Thomas Clock Co. for 48 years.

Mr. Albecker is one of the old-time German clockmakers to whom I have referred in previous reports. He knows the trade from beginning to end—learned it through strict and thorough apprenticeship—and is undoubtedly one of the finest clockmakers [in?] this clockmaking community. Though he has been in this country and in Thomaston since he was nineteen years old, he says there were German clockmakers here before him, many of them established for years. But most of them, he believes emigrated during the period immediately following the close of the Civil War and extending through the nineties.

“There were old Germans here when I came,” he said. “There was old man Kaiser, father of the present first selectman; and there was Mr. Lahmann and Hertzmann and Scheebel, who were what they called contractors.

“Contractors? Why they were specialists in some particular line of work. They worked at the company's plants and used the company tools and the like, but they took the work under contract and hired their own help. Mr. [Beardslee?] had a contract of some kind—I believe he made the screws—they do that with automatic machines now. Mr Saum, that was Charlie Saum's father, he had the contract for the lock work. They haven't given contracts for years.

“I served an apprenticeship for three years after I left school in Germany. That was in a small factory in the Black Forest Region. Then I went to work in Lenzkirch, which is a kind of clock-making center over there, where they make all the high grade clocks.

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The first two and a half years of my apprenticeship I didn't get a cent of money and for the last six months I got paid—but damned little. When I was through with it and had been working a little while I was 19 years old. I left because of the military business.—the [conscription—?] not that I was so anxious to dodge service—but sometimes they didn't get around to calling you until you were 23 or 24 years old and at that age a young man doesn't want to waste three years in the army.

“Well, I came to New York, all by myself, couldn't speak a work of English. And I spent a week down there looking around. I had an uncle there and he gave me the addresses of some of the clock manufacturing companies' branch offices. I went to the Seth Thomas office and there was a few fellow there who spoke German. I had my credentials and he could see right away that I knew the business, so he told me to go to Thomaston. He gave me letters, and I got [train?] directions and came on here.

“The first man I saw when I arrived at the company's main office was Aaron thomas, who was president then. He began to talk to me, after he'd read my letters, but of course I couldn't understand a word he said. But he made me understand what he wanted after his own fashion.

“He pulled out his watch and pointed to it. It was just one o'clock—time to go to work—and though it was Saturday that's just what that old fellow wanted me to do. I shook my head no. I wasn't going to go to work for half a day.

“The first man I met after I left the office apparently knew I was a greenhorn, for he led me to the shop of Jacob Hentz, the barber, and from then on I got along fine, for Jacob was German and I had someone to talk to.

“I can't tell you much about Aaron Thomas, because he retired shortly after I went to work for the company and William T Woodruff became president. There isn't a great deal I can

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tell you about him either. He was a proud, aristocratic type, not the kind who would mingle with the workers.

“I went to work on the old Nutmeg alarms and the number ten movements; and then I was transferred upstairs where the marine clocks were made and worked on the Locomotive—yes that was a company name but I don't know why it was called that—then I went to work on regulators.

“In [1896?] I went to work at the Waterbury Clock shop but after two Years they called me back to Seth Thomas, and I was glad to go. The Waterbury clock company was run the way they run factories all over today—push the help and cut prices—but there was non of that in Seth Thomas. We had more freedom than the average workers.

“There were a few Swiss clockmakers here when I first went to work, but none of them are left now, and the only one whose name I can recall at the moment was herner—he's been gone for years.

“Ear timing? The worker holds the clock against his ear and checks it with a master clock on his bench. The idea is to make the balance speed the same as that of the master clock. they don't do it at Seth Thomas any more because it can be done only with cheap movements that do not require fine adjusting and they've stopped making such movements.

“They used to have special 'coops' for the ear-timer because the noise of other workers would take his mind off what he was doing and the job requires absolute concentration. It was something like metronome work. Metronomes are used by students of music to aid them in timing. I worked on them for years and was in charge of the room where they were made.

“And I found that just as in ear-timing the worker had to have an 'ear' for the work, and some who had been successful in other jobs were failures at it. I couldn't break in girls on

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the work because they couldn't concentrate enough. Older, settled men, made the best bets."

"It's true that weather affects clocks, and I suppose it is due to chemical changes in the metal as the result of temperature. I have four or five in the house and during the summer they all keep time together, but in cooler weather no two of them are alike. So I suppose you could say truthfully that clocks run better in the summer than they do in winter."